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SUBJECT: GUINEA - AN ASSESSMENT, PART II

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Classified By: Ambassador Phillip Carter III for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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Preamble Part II

1.(S) Reftel describes the context of Guinea's current situation and outlines the currents of change that are developing within its society. The prospects for change are real but the process for political and economic reform is tenuous, irregular, and disorganized. This cable offers a bird's eye view of what the U.S. and the international community is currently doing to encourage greater cohesion among the various groups actively seeking change and the means by which we can try to constrain recidivist elements bent on maintaining a regime defined by corruption and autocratic rule. It also highlights the limits of what we can do. Further analytical reporting will focus more closely on elections and various possible scenarios that could develop as the political calendar advances in Guinea.

The National Assembly

2.(S) I have heard innumerable times that nothing will change until Conte leaves the scene. His full incapacitation or death will be the moment of crisis in Guinea. What can we do to help Guinea tip forward rather than back? We will support those institutions that can weather the storm of President Conte's eventual departure. We are trying to develop a collection of groups and associations that will turn towards a democratic process rather than support a military take-over or coup. Key to this is the National Assembly and upcoming legislative elections.

3.(S) Elections are the short-term focal point of U.S. efforts to promote political openness in Guinea. The current National Assembly is irrelevant and widely viewed as illegitimate since the deputies' mandate has expired. Sound elections will not only help instill confidence in the National Assembly as an institution, they will reinforce the prospects for a constitutional transfer of power. According to Guinea's constitution, in the event of Conte's death, the Speaker of the National Assembly serves as interim president in order to organize elections within 60 days. There is real hope that these upcoming elections, which will be co-managed by the Ministry of Interior and the Independent National Elections Commission (CENI), will be the most transparent in Guinea's history. We will work with G8 and ECOWAS missions and international organizations (UN, World Bank, EU among others) to maintain pressure on the GOG to hold timely elections.

4.(S) There is also great concern that the ruling elites will manipulate these elections. However, unlike in the past,

there is a broad and vocalized public desire to prevent manipulation. To buttress this desire, we need to marshal donor resources for an aggressive civic education campaign. In addition to engaging local communities, we need to find the means to broaden the reach of radio to the countryside, and break the hold of government's radio and television parastatal, and increase professionalism in both state and independent media.

Focusing on Impunity

5.(S) While there is a clear effort by the donor community to support clean elections (clean being relative), the issue of leadership and governance is critical, but problematic. Impunity of the ruling elites remains a nettlesome concern but one that can be addressed by a broadside approach. Corrupt, many of Guinea's elites are vulnerable to public exposure. There is a role for the international community in this regard. An aggressive public posture towards individuals clearly identified with corruption by the donors would be damning to the Presidency's entourage. It would also encourage those within the "consensus government" to temper their administrative excesses. In addition to considering and developing a "name and shame" public diplomacy strategy, we will also explore the possibility of visa bans against corrupt officials and, perhaps, legal measures against known Guinean narcotics traffickers.

6.(S) We need to engage the Guinean military more closely. Recalling our assistance during the rebel incursions from Sierra Leone in 2001, the Guinean military is generally well disposed to the U.S. The military thirsts for further US assistance which we should provide, particularly to foster Guinea's participation in African peacekeeping operations. Using ACOTA, IMET and ACSS resources will not only deepen our entree into the military but broaden our efforts to encourage the troops to remain in the barracks rather than take a direct role in a political transition.

7.(S) Similarly, our efforts to assist Guinea's police will help keep their reactions constrained when future civil disturbances occur. The thirst for assistance on the part of Guinea's security forces also offers us an opportunity to develop a counter-narcotics strategy that could effectively target certain traffickers. On the issue of violence, while the prospect for civil war in Guinea is unlikely, civil unrest will remain highly probable through the 2010 presidential election.

Outreach

8.(S) Finally, we need to openly support the new groups and associations that are sprouting up around the country. The embassy's effort to launch a human rights working group with civil society, along with our efforts to create "alumni associations" of Guinean's who have been International Visitors, Fulbrighters, IMET and ACSS participants is one aspect of this support. Our support for the Guinean Women's forum and various youth groups falls in this vein. The embassy's "Adopt a Community" program will broaden our outreach into Guinea's countryside by having one Embassy official become a frequent visitor to a specific town, developing a personal connection to local leaders and groups before, during and after the legislative elections.

The Limits of What We Can Do

9.(S) As we push the positive, we must also recognize the limits of and constraints on our efforts. The incongruousness between our resources and our policy objectives constrains what we can do to support good governance, democratization, and economic growth. Notwithstanding the lack of resources,

we are not putting what little money we have to where it counts most and where we need to take risks. Rather than spend money on unsustainable health programs, we should be broadening our capacity to engage civil society, and supporting macroeconomic reform and agricultural production.

10.(S) There is also the temporal reality. This will take time as well as money. The potential for democratic and economic reform in Guinea has never been greater, but it is a fragile and risky venture. While success is not assured, opportunities will arise for us to reinforce grassroots governance, temper military adventurism, and attack corruption. Taking advantage of these unforeseen opportunities as well as countering ongoing efforts to thwart democratic change will require flexibility on this mission's part as well as by the international community. The U.S. is on the forefront supporting peaceful and democratic change, promoting human rights, and encouraging economic reform. We need to be joined on stage by others. Greater cooperation is needed, particularly from Guinea's African partners - - ECOWAS, the AU, as well as South Africa and Nigeria. Perhaps reinvigorating the International Contact Group of the Mano River Basin may be an avenue to foster greater interest and cooperation among Guinea's traditional donors and its African counterparts.

Looking Ahead

11.(S) "Le changement" is uttered by almost everyone everywhere in Guinea. It is, however, undefined and heavily tinged with frustration. Much has to happen between now and when legislative elections are held hopefully in November/December 2008. Local groups need to find their political voice with the country's weak political parties. the political parties need to hold caucus' and congresses to find popular candidates. Country's security forces will want to control but popular pressure must increase to keep the military in the barracks. Civil society needs to coalesce. In short, a lot needs to happen and, in the final analysis, change in Guinea must come from within and be molded by Guinean hands. What shape it will take is uncertain. What is certain is that change is coming.
CARTER